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SUBJECT: SLM/ABDUL WAHID TO LAUNCH OFFICE IN ISRAEL

¶1. (U) Summary: Abdul Wahid Al Nur has announced that the SLM will open an office in Tel Aviv and praised the Israeli government for giving refuge to Darfur to protect them from genocide. While NCP officials and much of the Sudanese media condemned Al Nur's statements, reaction in Darfur is largely positive given wide-spread resentment against both the regime in Khartoum and Arabs in general. End summary.

¶2. (U) In a February 26 announcement, Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) leader Abdulwahid Al Nur confirmed earlier press reports that the SLM had opened an office in Israel. "The office was created by some SLM members who sought refuge in Israel from the killings by the Sudanese Government." He further praised Israel for "protecting Darfur's youth from genocide." Al-Nur maintains that the new office is consistent with the SLM's attempts to remain active outside Sudan.

¶3. (U) "Now we have an office in Israel like we do in Egypt, Libya, Kenya, USA, Britain and other countries," said Nur. Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Al-Nur stated that "according to the precepts of the SLM, the two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians, should recognize each other and peacefully co-exist as neighbors." Al-Nur emphasized that he is not afraid of repercussions among Arab or Islamist constituencies, affirming that he is a Muslim who knows the Quran. The "revolution" in Darfur will change Sudan's internal and external policies, said Al Nur, including the prohibition on relations with Israel.

¶4. (U) In response to the announcement of the SLM office in Israel, the National Congress Party (NCP) launched an aggressive, large-scale media campaign to discredit Al Nur, asserting that his relationship with Tel Aviv will lead to the rejection of his leadership and his "political death." One NCP official stated that the SLM's ties with Israel conflicted with Darfur's Islamic values. Senior Presidential Advisor Nafie Ali Nafie, the hardline NCP Sec retary for Political Affairs who holds the Darfur portfolio within the Sudanese Government, accused Al Nur of planting Sudanese in Israel to convert them to Judaism and to effect a normalization of relations between Khartoum and Jerusalem. "Opening an office in Israel is material proof that the Darfur crisis is manipulated by foreign hands and the Jewish lobby," said Nafie. State Minister of Information and NCP Secretary of Information Kamal Obeid said that Al Nur's move targets Sudan's "unity and faith." Pro-NCP journalists and columnists wrote articles describing Al Nur's step as the beginning of his political end. Sudanese television featured Al-Nur's image backed by the Israeli flag and pictures of the Palestinian suffering in Gaza in some reports. Some reports claimed that the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have captured arms and ammunition from rebel-controlled areas that is manufactured in Israel.

¶5. (U) Osman Muhammad Yousif Kibir, the Wali of North Darfur State, condemned Al Nur's announcement during a February 3 protest in El Fasher against Danish cartoons criticizing Islam. Kibir called on the international community and the Sudanese Government to bypass Al

Nur in future peace negotiations. He described Al Nur as a communist and a secularist who "would gain nothing from Israel except a few cents and then will be thrown away." The pro-government Fur Shura (Consultative) Council also said in a press release that Abdul Wahid does not represent them and that this move was not endorsed by them.

¶6. (U) Hussein Abu-Sharati, a prominent IDP leader and head of the indigenous Fur native administration that is opposed to Khartoum, said in a public statement that Darfur IDPs support the inauguration of an SLM office in Tel Aviv and are happy to see a country like Israel opening its doors to ease the suffering of the people of Darfur. Abu-Sharati told Sudan Tribune that after five years of atrocities and suffering caused by "the so-called brothers in Islam, we understood where that hatred can lead. Why did these people not demonstrate against the killings and rape of Darfur's people? What is more important, these atrocities or the opening of an office in Israel?"

¶7. (SBU) Comment: Al Nur's popularity in Darfur, particularly among the Fur, and the vehement resentment of Darfur's African tribes against perceived exploitation by Arab groups provides some political cover for Al Nur to open an office in Israel. While the utility of the SLM office in Israel is minimal, Al Nur's announcement is yet another example of his deft manipulation of the Darfurian body politic and ability to antagonize the regime. The move also feeds into the ruling NCP's well-developed paranoia that events in Darfur are the work of well-organized foreign players, the "Zionist Lobby" being one of the most prominent of these alleged entities.

FERNANDEZ